

REFUGEES IN LIBYA

Refugeesinlibya@gmail.com

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**Meeting with the UNHCR-LIBYA Chief of Mission Mr Jean Paul Cavalieri and his deputy Jamal, Refugees and Asylum seekers.
Full transcription!**

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

- I thank you so much for your presence today, and your participation/contribution to finding solutions to the problems that we are currently facing.
“we would like to hear from each one of you, the reasons why you have gathered at CDC since the beginning of October, what challenges you have faced while camping there, what have changed since we last had meetings on the 12th & 13th of October and what does your people want”

Yambio David Oliver Yasona (South Sudanese)

- Thank you for bringing us here today. “Since the first of Oct, the Libyan authorities took their security arrangements based on false allegations, of criminalities, prostitution, drug dens and other illegal activities. These security arrangements saw a weird approach taken by the authorities with crackdowns on our homes amidst our sleep, made mass arrests with an extreme force of violence, brought mass weapons of destruction, arrested pregnant women, newly born children from two months old and above. People shot at and wounded

willingly, and this move claimed one life of a migrant and 15 wounded. However, those arrested were taken and arbitrarily detained in detention centers which you know and others that you do not know and might never know, where all atrocities, tortures, sexual violations, humiliations, and human rights violations are one way irreplaceable activity. Therefore, since the 2nd of October the survivors of these mass and unjust arrests got people frightened and their lives threatened which then brought their gatherings to the CDC where they have been camping for the last 30 days. Nevertheless, those arrested and detained in the khotshal prison however went on a hunger strike and broke the cells where they were held for a complete one week like animals with no access to basic needs of life, including toilets, showers, pure drinking water and food, where they were always tortured. They escaped and joined their brothers who were camping at your front office. And during these chaos and the battle for freedom, dozens of refugees and migrants lost their lives with hundreds wounded, but reported by IOM that only 6 were shot dead, and the attorney general office issued a statement claiming that only 1 died. The campaign has brought so many miseries and challenges where thousands of people have no access to toilets, shelters, sanitation and life's basic needs including medical intervention while camping at your office. We have lost two lives so far, one who got shot by an unknown man and the other got hit by a car of the passersby. For these reasons we have been camping and peacefully demonstrating for protection and evacuations to countries of safety. Because people feel unprotected by the Libyan authorities and your office does nothing about it”.

Bahar Mohamed Hassan (Somalian)

- Thank you so much Mr Jean Paul for having come to listen to our problems “People are tired from what David just mentioned, people need safety and evacuation but you are saying that no one can be / will be evacuated until he meets

the criteria and is then processed to leave to the host countries either to the emergency transit mechanism or directly to resettlement countries, so what is the solution?"

Haben Tesfazghi (Eritrean)

- "First of all we have problems with ambulances where we call the hotlines for hours with an answer and the delay of arrival at times of emergency. We have people sleeping in very bad conditions exposed to the cold, in an open street with no toilets, food and shelter. We have our wives and children locked up and separated from us and in very miserable prisons where they are raped and their rights violated. We had four people shot and they have not been provided with a quality medical assistance"

Amu Alsir Babo (Sudanese)

- "Jean Paul, you know that you closed your office in our faces when we so much needed your help and protection. Which hindered women, children, victims of tortures, traumatized sick people from accessing medical assistance. You abandoned these victims to sleep in the streets where they have no access to toilets, shelters, sanitation and life's basic needs. You should have limited and tackle these problems in the earlier days before letting us spend four weeks of nightmares and anguish. Tell us what's happening with the ambulances, why is it that the processing of asylum claims takes so long going beyond ten years especially for sudanese"?.

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

- "Thank you all for sharing your ideas and the problems that you are facing while camping at the CDC and reasons why you are there. I will respond to each of your questions in accordance with what I know and what I have and the rest depends on the Libyan authorities. First of all we were saddened by the death of the two young men and we strongly condemned the acts that led to their demise and we have

called on the relevant authorities to investigate the matter. We also condemned the raids on Gargaresh and we are calling on the authorities to ensure that it does not repeat itself or happen in any other neighborhoods. We closed our doors because of security concerns and acts that could result into extreme violence from people who prevented and threatened the most vulnerable persons from being assisted. And the issues with ambulance has been out of control because it is managed by our partners and they had reasons why they delayed or failed to show their presence at times, therefore, we will work on it and make sure ambulances are brought to the CDC. For the files processing and its lagging, these are things I cannot fully explain because there are thousands of refugees and asylum seekers registered with our commission. And we have limited employees with limited mandates to operate in Libya”

- Now let's discuss the issues of the Ambulance and the reopening of the CDC and how we can best help you. And then we will come to evacuation and resettlement.
- I have an opinion regarding the ambulance, we can talk to our partners to provide two ambulances that will stay at the CDC 24/7. Please David, Bahar , Haben and Alsir Babo, do you guarantee the safety of the doctors and drivers of those who would be managing the ambulances and do you support the ideas?

David said I support the idea

Bahar said he supports the idea

Haben said he doesn't support the idea

Alsir Babo said he supports the idea.

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

- Now let's talk about the reopening of the CDC office. Do you think it is possible that the CDC can reopen so that we can provide assistance to you? And how can you help us do that?
- If the office opens , we will be able to provide assistance to 100-150 persons a day or more if we have the ability to.

- We also want to ensure the safety of the crowds from persons that are armed and threaten the beneficiaries once opting for assistance rather than evacuation.
- Evacuation of those camping at the CDC will not happen and cannot happen in this way. And we are unable to evacuate large numbers until there are host countries willing to receive them in.

Yambio David Oliver Yasona (South Sudanese)

- “Listen Jean Paul Cavalieri, I don't support and guarantee any safety amongst the campaigners and the staffs while reopening the CDC office”
- “People have been there for 30 days passing through hell and in a repeated circle of suffering, and you want to convince them with assistance for shelters but do not guarantee their safety while in Libyan society again?”
- We are tired and already aggressive because you don't protect and respect our rights, the asylum and refugee documentation you issued us is valueless in the Libyan society and the government, how do you expect us to collect these assistance and feel free or safe to go back and mingle with people who kills us and are not punished by the law?
- So to be short, I don't think you can reopen the CDC unless you are coming to start the processing of evacuation procedures, not your mere assistance, telling people to shelter themselves because you cannot and do not guarantee their safety.

Amu Alsir Babo (Sudanese)

- Jean Paul Cavalieri, do you ensure and guarantee us safety and protection that if we open the door of your office and collect your assistance, go back to Libyan society?
- Do you guarantee that when I go home, close my door and sleep , no militias or the Libyan authorities will break into my apartment and forcibly arrest me, arbitrarily detain me, extort and violate my rights?

- Can you build us an open camp like the GDF of 2019 where the Tajoura airstrike survivors lived, and grant us safety?
- And why did you not provide these assistance in the earlier days when we so much needed it but instead you suspended all activities and abandoned us?

Bahar Mohamed Hassan (Somalian)

- Jean Paul Cavalieri, we know exactly what the assistance is and what value you can provide us.
- Do you think your 150 dinars and the gift cards worth 350 dinars can rent us apartments, cover our needs and is it worth our lives if you don't guarantee us any safety and protection?

Haben Tesfazghi (Eritrean)

- Jean Paul Cavalieri, people are tired and they need solutions, they can reopen the CDC office and take the assistance but we are afraid of going back to the Libyan communities, we are afraid of being detained again, we are tired and sorrowful for the everyday death of our brothers.
- None of us is willing to stay at your front office, not even for a day but we are there because we don't have any other choices, it is our lives and we don't have to play with it, you too should not.

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

- Thank you all for your opinions. I am sorry that I can not assure you of any safety and protection upon your return to Libyan society, and this is something we are negotiating with the authorities for.
- I can not build an open shelter that can accommodate all of you because the Libyan government didn't agree with the idea quite a long time ago, but we are and we will keep on approaching them for these approvals.
- In the earlier days we wanted to provide assistance to you but there were persons among you who prevented this from happening, they threatened the most vulnerable people and

prevented them from accessing this assistance. There were people with armed weapons who threatened our staff, and one of them got attacked who is now with a broken leg and receiving assistance.

- Well, the value of the money (cash assistance) that we do provide to people might not be enough, but it depends on the number of beneficiaries like the family and singles.
- We are also working with other partners to make sure that they provide you with extra assistance, including life savings. Though it is not worth your lives but this is the sad reality that we are facing, we are just an organization working under the Libyan government, we can not impose on them anything because they are the owners and leaders of this land.
- We also assure you that we have never played with your lives and we do not and will not . We are here because of you not because we wanted to be here. We are here to help you and protect your rights.

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

Now let's discuss Evacuations and Resettlement.

- We are happy to announce the resumption of the humanitarian flights leaving Libya this year and forth.
- As of 2021 only 1100 persons will benefit from evacuation to our emergency transit mechanism to Rwandan and Niger, resettlement to third countries with direct flights from Libya and these numbers are less than 1% to the existing 42,000 Registered Refugees and Asylum seekers with our office here in Libya.
- We are also speaking to Embassies to offer more lands for resettlements and humanitarian corridors.
- We are also sorry that only 100 persons will benefit from evacuation amongst those who are currently camping at our CDC office in Al Seraj area. And these will be the most vulnerable who are already identified.

Yambio David Oliver Yasona (South Sudanese)

- Jean Paul, your commission or UNHCR organization have been in Libya for the last 30 years. Would you please tell us why Libyan haven't signed the 1951 Genève Refugee convention ?
- We understand that you have been working in Libya under limited mandates and memorandum of understanding (MoU) but why is that even what is listed in the MoU is not implemented, protected and respected by you and the Libyan government?
- Your Refugees and asylum seekers have been deported to countries where their lives are threatened but you did nothing about it.
- You also know that your commission and the documentation issued are useless to refugees and asylum seekers, so why do you continue to issue them with it , and also receive funds from donors and states bringing it to a country that did not ratify the 1951 refugee convention?
- Do you admit that you are to be held responsible for death cases of refugees and asylum seekers in Libya that have gone unpunished?
- If you can't offer or grant us safety and protection to our rights then why do you still want your office to open and why do you still hold our data?
- Why don't you tell your donors that you can't help us and you can't protect us, talk to the African Union, EU member states Canada , tell them that you can't do so much for us and you want to close, park and go so that we can know we are fatherless even in under the watch of the world.
- Why is it that our family, brothers and sisters are still held up in the detention centers even after the public press conference which stated that they would be released and would have the freedom of movement, work and education while in Libya. Today is three weeks and we do not know their situations and whereabouts.

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

- **Libya did not sign and ratify the constitution or the 1951 Genève Refugee convention because of its political issues and the geographical features and existence.**
- **Libya is a home to 6 million inhabitants and is the emerging route to Europe. Therefore the Libyan government is afraid that their country would be dominated by the refugees if they sign and ratify the 1951 Refugee convention.**
- **With the limited mandates that we have to operate in Libya and per the MoU, things were a bit moving until for the last decade after the fall of Gaddafi, there has been no government then and you know this. And we hope that this year, As it walks towards election, Libya will become a nation with a government whereby we can call on them to ratify the 1951 convention which will foresaw the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.**
- **We know that we have been unable to provide enough protection to refugees and asylum seekers in the last decade, but you should also understand that Libya has been going through its own war and had its own crisis.**
- **We are currently working hard with the authorities to release those in detention centers.**

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

Here are five steps that we will be taking to approach the government and better your situation and bring about change.

- 1. To advocate for the release of women and children.**
- 2. To stop arbitrary detention and the closures of these DCIM camps.**
- 3. To ask the government to provide a space where we can build an open shelter that will be managed and driven by organizations like UNHCR and its partners, MSF, IRC, RED CRESCENT, IOM, IMC, CESVI NRC AND DRC.**
- 4. To advocate for the recognition of the refugee and asylum seeker document provided to you by the UNHCR commission. And issuing of documents to migrants who are**

not registered with us and give them the space and freedom to work in Libya.

5. To make sure the abrupt suspension of humanitarian flights leaving Libya does not repeat itself again.

Yambio David Oliver Yasona (South Sudanese)

- Why do you want to advocate for the release of women and children only? Thousands of men who were arbitrarily detained, who are now being tortured and extorted, why only women and children and how many are these women and children, do you know how many men are in these detention centers?
- We understand your justification that you have limited mandates in Libya, for these reasons most services are denied to us under these pretexts. Do you want to tell us that the limited mandates are hindering you from increasing the number of employees to serve these 42 thousand registered asylum seekers and refugees?
- Doesn't it hinder your system and employees from answering our calls via the hotlines?
- Does it hinder you from providing a good health system for refugees and asylum seekers who are dying while not seen by doctors?
- Do these limitations hinder you from closing your office, quit and go since you are not given the chance to do your job properly?

Jean Paul Cavalieri (Chief of Mission in Libya)

- The government questioned us about where to take these detainees if released, how do we provide assistance to them if thousands are camping at our community day center office?
- The government is willing to release your families, brothers and sisters only on three conditions.
- 1; their immediate deportation to countries of origin.

- 2; their direct evacuations to the emergency transit mechanism to countries that are willing to receive and host them.
- 3; their direct flights to countries where they have been accepted for resettlement.
- Therefore that is why we are advocating for the release of women and children because they are the most vulnerable ones.
- We are trying our best to employ enough employees that we serve and deliver life saving assistance to you and the procession of your files.
- Also we are working hard to improve the hotlines and adjust how the system works and we continue to apologize to people who called and went unanswered.
- We are doing our best to provide enough healthcares and a system that will save lives.

Yambio David Oliver Yasona (South Sudanese)

- Jean Paul, go and tell your donors that we are bleeding.
- We are not ready to take any other assistance and go back to the Libyan communities where our rights are violated and our lives are at risk as you do not guarantee us any safety and protection.
- Tell the world that you can not protect the 42 thousand refugees and asylum seekers registered with your office, therefore let them intervene.
- Tell them to take us to safety and it is not necessarily Europe but where we can feel protected and our rights are respected, in countries where we can nourish ourselves and can be accepted or fit in their societies.
- Tell your donors that the Libyan government is not willing to cooperate and admit to respecting and protecting refugees and asylum seekers, therefore those who fear their lives are at risk should be evacuated out of Libya.
- Tell your donors that thousands are still held in detention centers waiting for countries of safety to receive them as

their freedom lies in the hands of the host countries or the emergency transit mechanism centers.

- And thank you for today's meeting as We look forward to seeing changes and quick evacuations to countries of safety.



"A group photo taken after the meeting"

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